LEAD GUITAR 101

Flipped Bluesy Sixths

BY ANDY ELLIS

Sixths may be the most versatile intervals available to blues, funk, country, and rock guitarists. Used creatively, major and minor sixths can suggest chords and provide the hooky harmonic lines of a horn or string section. In our previous installment ("Bluesy Sliding Sixths," Aug. '05), we tackled a righteous, piano-inspired comping pattern built from sixths on a 5-6-♭7-6 foundation. Now we'll switch the 5-6-♭7-6 line from the lower to the upper voice—essentially flipping our bluesy sixths—to discover a new set of soulful sounds.

Kenny Burrell hits a soulful double-stop.

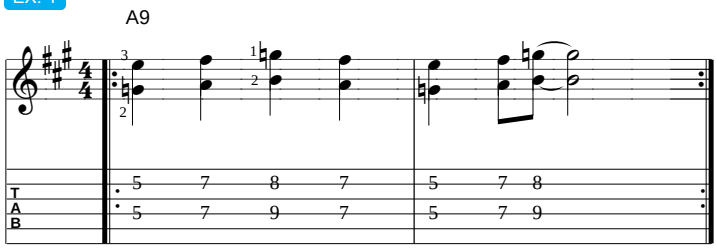
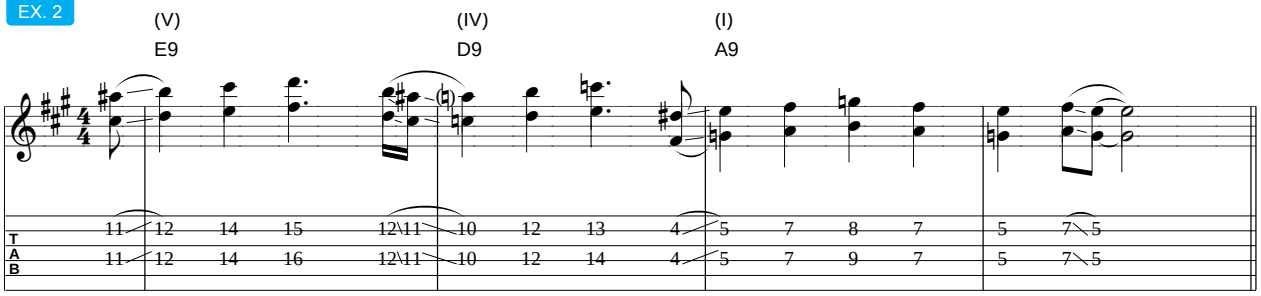
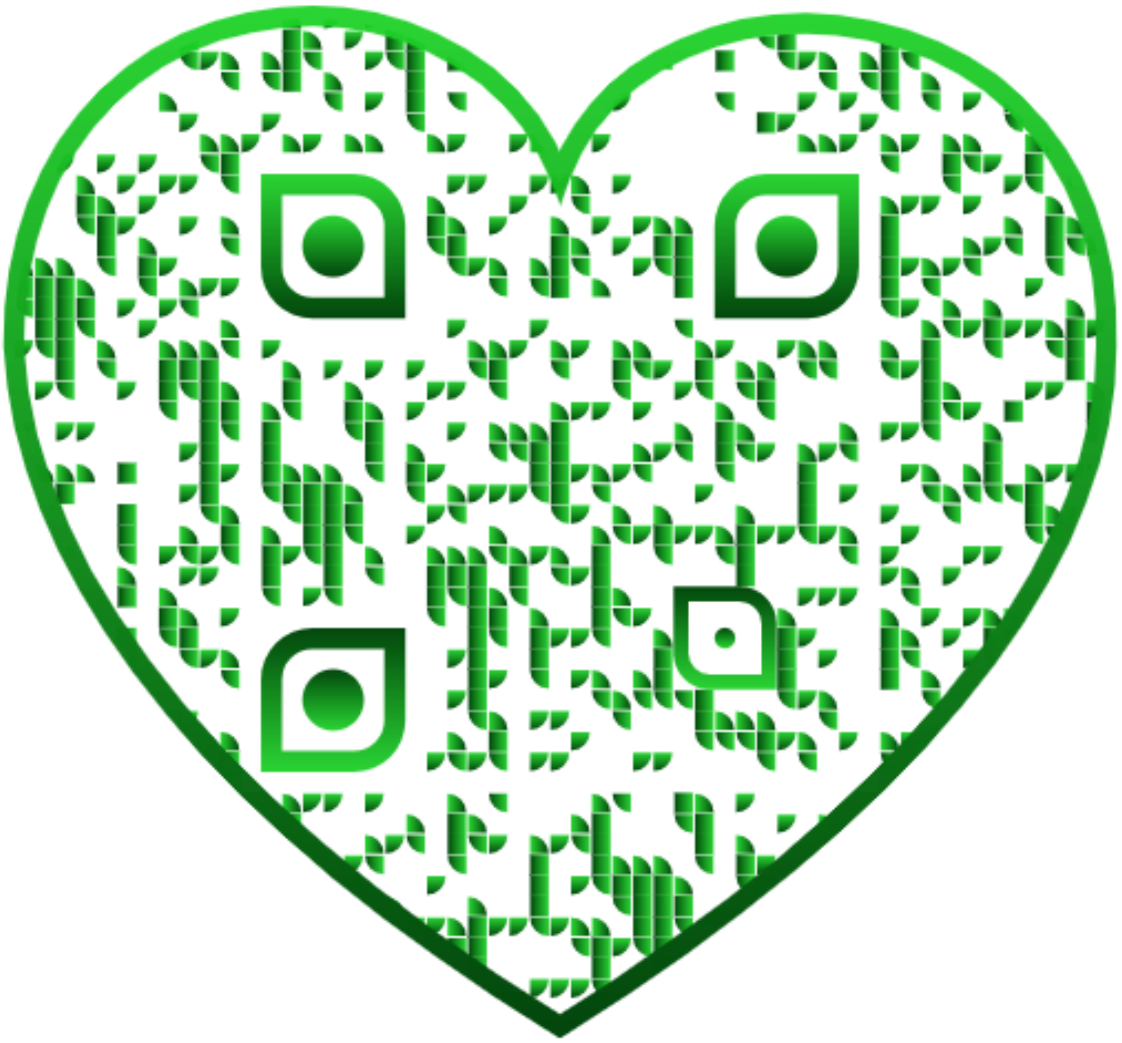
Ex. 1 lays out the moves. In this instance, we're playing an A9 phrase, though these sixths can be transposed to outline any dominant-9th chord. Hearing the root can help you place these intervals in their harmonic context. You'll find roots lurking on strings 6 and 1, parallel with the opening major sixth. (That's at the 5th fret, in this example.)

In bar 1, notice how the top voice is our pal, the 5-6-♭7-6 (E-F♯-G-F♯) line. From Chuck Berry to P-Funk, this series of notes has one mission—make the music groove. Notice how the suggested fingering keeps your 2nd digit on the fourth string, where it serves to guide you along the fretboard through the various moves.

In Ex. 2, we drape our flipped sixths across a V-IV-I progression. Soul-jazz guitarists from the '60s and early '70s—including Kenny Burrell, George Benson, and Grant Green—played similar phrases in uptown blues and funk tunes.

Next time: Honky tonk sixths.

EX. 1



EX. 2